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《研究ノート》

A rationale for use of the final exam week  
at Sapporo Gakuin University

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Abstract

This brief report addresses two persistent questions among teachers, particularly of “General English” classes, at Sapporo Gakuin University: 1) whether including an “exam week” in the semesterly syllabus is mandatory, and 2) why General English classes are worth only one credit when the majority of other university classes are worth two. An examination of the *Daigaku Secchi Kijun* (University Establishment Standards), a set of regulations governing the structure and purpose of universities promulgated by the Ministry of Education, offers some insightful background and tentative answers to these two questions.

Keywords: sixteenth week, exam week, credit, English class, General English, syllabus, University Establishment Standards

## Introduction

All Japanese universities wishing to be publicly recognized as reputable higher education institutions are subject to review by two major accrediting agencies: the Ministry of Education (hereinafter, the “Ministry”) and the Japan University Accreditation Association<sup>(1)</sup>. The Ministry outlines its expectations of universities in a set of guidelines, first published in 1956 and revised a number of times thereafter, called the *Daigaku Secchi Kijun* (大学設置基準, “University Establishment Standards,” hereinafter, the “Standards”). In order to gain or to maintain accreditation, universities must periodically submit a report to each agency outlining their adherence to the Ministry’s Standards, as well as detailing their autonomous efforts to self-evaluate and improve their educational processes.

It is well known to Japanese universities that, as a result of a steadily dwindling number of applicants, competition among universities is steadily increasing<sup>(2)</sup>. In order to survive, universities are taking measures to ensure they stay in the good graces of accrediting agencies. Particularly, they are paying closer attention to the rules and regulations of these agencies, making

adjustments to curriculum and policy accordingly. The purpose of this brief report is to clarify the rationale behind one recent adjustment to the semesterly class load at Sapporo Gakuin University (hereinafter, “SGU”) through an interpretation of the Standards, and in doing so to address a lingering question among teachers at SGU as to whether or not they are required to conduct a final exam during the sixteenth “exam week.” Additionally, the Standards offer insight into another lingering question among both teachers and students at SGU as to why the mandatory General English classes are worth only one credit per semester instead of two.

## Use of the sixteenth “exam week” for test purposes

In the 2010 academic year SGU formally inserted a 15<sup>th</sup> week of classes into its bi-semesterly schedule. As figures 1 and 2 below illustrate, previously the schedule consisted of 14 weeks of “regular classes,” followed by a 15<sup>th</sup> week for examinations. Classes during “exam week” at SGU follow a special 60-minute “exam format” (including a special chime schedule), rather than regular 90-minute classes.

**Figure 1. SGU semester schedule before 2010 academic year**

Regular classes, 90-minute periods	Examinations, 60-min. periods	<b>=15 weeks</b>
14 weeks	1 week	

**Figure 2. SGU semester schedule after 2010 academic year**

Regular classes, 90-minute periods	Examinations, 60-min. periods	<b>=16 weeks</b>
15 weeks	1 week	

Regarding semester schedules, the “14+exam=15” semester schedule seems to satisfy a particular clause in the Standards, which reads as follows below. A transcription in italics and the present author’s translation in quotes are included. An unofficial parallel English translation alongside the original Japanese text of the entire University Establishment Standards is available online<sup>(3)</sup>.

第六章 教育課程 *Dai-roku-shou: Kyouiku katei*

“Chapter 6: Curricula”

第二十三条（各授業科目の授業期間）各授業科目の授業は、十週又は十五週にわたる期間

を単位として行うものとする。 *Dai-nijuu-san-jou (Kaku-jugyou kamoku no jugyou kikan). Kaku-jugyou kamoku no jugyou wa, jussuu mata wa juugoshuu ni wataru kikan wo tan-i to shite okonau mono to suru.*

“Article 23 (Term of classes for each class subject). Classes for each class subject shall be held over a duration of either 10 weeks or 15 weeks.”

Article 23 states that universities can choose between either a 10-week or 15-week semester schedule by which to conduct classes. We expect, therefore, that two 15-week semesters per year would add to a 30-week yearly schedule. Intriguingly, the preceding Article 22 suggests some confusing arithmetic:

第二十二條（一年間の授業期間）一年間の授業を行う期間は、定期試験等を含め、三十五週にわたることを原則とする。 *Dai-nijuu-ni-jou (Ichi-nen-kan no jugyou kikan). Ichinen-kan no jugyou wo okonau kikan wa, teiki shiken-tou wo fukume, sanjuu-go-shuu ni wataru koto wo gensoku to suru.*

“Article 22 (Term of Classes for a Year). The yearly term over which classes are conducted shall be 35 weeks, in principle, including the terms of regular examinations, etc.”

If we consider that two 16-week semesters, including a final exam week for each, add up to 32 weeks, we are left to wonder why Article 22 calls for 35 weeks. This is not specified, however it is possible that the 35-week period is intended to mean “calendar weeks,” including holidays, rather than actual “class time” weeks. Looking at the 2010 academic year calendar, the period for spring semester classes beginning on Monday 12 April 2010 and ending (including “exam week”) on Friday 6 August 2010 is 17 weeks. The period for fall semester classes beginning on Monday 27 September 2010 and ending (including “exam week”) on Friday 4 February 2011 is 19 weeks.

Mon. 12 Apr. 2010～ Fri. 6 Aug. 2010 (including “exam week”)	=17 weeks
Mon. 27 Sep. 2010～ Fri. 4 Feb. 2011 (including “exam week”)	=19 weeks
	+
	<b>36 weeks</b>

This kind of calculation better satisfies the “35 weeks” called for in Article 22. However, the key phrase in Article 22 seems to be “in principle.”

It is further intriguing, if not bewildering, that there is no direction anywhere in the Standards as to whether or not the 15-week semester schedule must include a sixteenth “exam week.” Regarding examinations, Article 27 reads as follows:

第七章 卒業の要件等 *Dai-nana-shou: sotsugyou no youken-tou*

“Chapter 7: Requirements for graduation”

第二十七条（単位の授与）大学は、一の授業科目を履修した学生に対しては、試験の上単位を与えるものとする。 *Dai-nijuu-nana-jou (tan-i no juyo). Daigaku wa, hitotsu no jugyou kamoku wo rishuu shita gakusei ni taishite wa, shiken no ue tan-i wo ataeru mono to suru.*

“Article 27 (Granting credit). Universities shall grant credit, pending examination, to students who complete each class.”

Article 27 continues:

ただし、第二十一条三項の授業科目については、大学の定める適切な方法により学習の成果を評価して単位を与えることができる。 *Tadashi, dai-nijuu-ichi-jou sankou no jugyou kamoku ni tsuite wa, daigaku no sadameru tekisetsu na houhou ni yori gakushuu no seika wo hyouka shite tan-i wo ataeru koto ga dekiru.*

“Provided, however, that for [types of] classes listed in Article 21 Item 3, universities shall have the right to grant credit according to assessment methods they deem appropriate for the evaluation of students' academic achievement.”

The types of classes mentioned in Article 21 Item 3 are: 1. lectures (講義, *kougi*), seminars (演習, *enshuu*), experiments (実験, *jikken*), practical training (実習, *jisshuu*), and skills practice (実技, *jitsugi*), which essentially include all types of classes at a university. Article 27 stipulates that credits are to be granted for students' completion of a class based on an examination, but does not specify the format or time frame for that examination.

For more insight into why SGU added a 15<sup>th</sup> week of classes, we can take a closer look at Article 21, which specifies the number of credits to be given for classes, as well as the amount of study time one credit is intended to equal:

第二十一条（単位）各授業科目の単位数は、大学において定めるものとする。

2 前項の単位数を定めるに当たっては、一単位の授業科目を四十五時間の学習を必要とする内容をもって構成することを標準とし、授業の方法に応じ、当該授業による教育効果、授業時間外に必要な学修等を考慮して、次の基準により単位数を計算するものとする。

*Dai-nijuu-ichi-jou (tan-i). Kaku-jugyou kamoku no tan-i-suu wa, daigaku ni oite sadameru mono to suru. 2. Zenkou no tan-i-suu wo sadameru ni atatte wa, ichi-tan-i no jugyou kamoku wo yonjuu-go-jikan no gakushuu wo hitsuyou to suru naiyou wo motte kousei suru koto wo hyoujun to shi, jugyou no houhou ni ouji, tougai jugyou ni yoru kyouiku kouka, jugyou jikan-gai ni hitsuyou na gakushuu-tou wo kouryo shite, tsugi no kijun ni yori tan-i-suu wo keisan suru mono to suru.*

“Article 21 (Credit). [Section 1.] Universities shall choose the number of credits to be awarded for each class subject.”

Section 2. With regard to number of credits aforementioned in Section 1, a class subject for one credit shall normally be constructed with contents that require 45 hours of study, and, according to classroom methods and considering the educational results of said class and the necessary study outside of the classroom, credit numbers shall be calculated according to the following standards:

一 講義及び演習については、十五時間から三十時間までの範囲で大学が定める時間の授業をもって一単位とする。 1. *Kougi oyobi enshuu ni tsuite wa, juugo-jikan kara sanjuu-jikan made no han-i de daigaku ga sadmaeru jikan no jugyou wo motte ichi-tan-i to suru.*

二 実験、実習及び実技については、三十時間から四十五時間までの範囲で大学が定める時間の授業をもって一単位とする。 2. *Jikken, jisshuu oyobi jitsugi ni tsuite wa, sanjuu-jikan kara yonjuu-go-jikan made no han-i de daigaku ga sadameru jikan no jugyou wo motte ichi-tan-i to suru.*

Item 1. Universities shall choose to require a range of 15 to 30 [in-classroom study] hours to grant one credit for lecture and seminar classes.

Item 2. Universities shall choose to require a range of 30 to 45 [in-classroom study] hours to grant one credit for experiment [e.g. chemistry], practical training and skills practice classes.”

Article 21 offers two particular pieces of information: “45 hours of study,” as well as ranges of “in-classroom study hours” for certain types of classes.

We have hereto established that:

- ✓ semesters can be either 10-weeks or 15 weeks,
- ✓ the number of class weeks in a year should in principle be 35,
- ✓ students should receive credit for taking a class after an examination, and
- ✓ a one-credit class should be worth 45 hours of study.

With regard to whether examinations in the sixteenth week are mandatory, the Standards are sufficiently vague. The old “14 class weeks+1 exam week=15 weeks” system superficially satisfies the “15 week” clause in Article 23, but 14 weeks of regular classes cannot quantifiably accommodate the 45 hours of “study time” called for in Article 21.

In order to understand why, we need to understand how “study time” is calculated. In doing so, the reason for General English classes being worth one credit per semester instead of two

becomes clear. First, it is necessary to know what is meant by “45 hours of study.” An “hour,” for the purposes of Standards Article 27, is not the usual 60 minutes but rather, as I refer to it, a “study hour” of 45 minutes (this is nowhere recorded in the Standards—SGU administration clarified this distinction to me). Further, as Article 27 Item 1 and Item 2 outline (somewhat cryptically), the type of class determines how many credits (one or two) are to be awarded per semester. What is not clearly stated is that Item 1 and Item 2 refer to a range of “in-classroom study hours”—that is, the number of 45-minute study hours spent in the classroom. Ranges are mentioned, but in fact SGU and assumedly most universities use the lowest number of each range in their calculations. In other words, for lectures and seminars, at least 15 of the 45 study hours must be spent in the classroom per semester. For experiment classes, practical training classes and skills practice classes, at least 30 hours must be spent in the classroom per semester. The following Figure 3 illustrates the breakdown of in-class and out-of-class “study hours” per type of class.

**Figure 3. In-class and out-of-class study hours, per type of class, per semester**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ 1 credit = 45 “study hours”</li> <li>✓ 1 “study hour” = 45 minutes</li> <li>✓ 1 “koma” (university class) = 90 min. (two 45-min. “study hours”)</li> </ul>
<p><b>For lecture classes, seminar classes:</b></p> $  \begin{array}{rcl}  & 45 & \text{study hours} \\  - & 15 & \text{minimum in-class study hours} \\  \hline  & 30 & \text{out-of-class (homework) study hours}  \end{array}  $ <p>1 credit = minimum 15 in-class study hours  <math>(30 = 15 \times 2) = </math> <b><u>2 credits per semester</u></b></p>
<p><b>For experiment classes, practical training classes, skills practice classes:</b></p> $  \begin{array}{rcl}  & 45 & \text{study hours} \\  - & 30 & \text{minimum in-class study hours} \\  \hline  & 15 & \text{out-of-class (homework) study hours}  \end{array}  $ <p>1 credit = minimum 30 in-class study hours  <math>= </math> <b><u>1 credit per semester</u></b></p>

A 14-week semester schedule doesn't fulfill the number of in-class study hours called for per semester by the Standards. It should also be noted that, with respect to out-of-class study hours, universities have no direct way of measuring or enforcing how much study students actually are doing outside the classroom. They can only account for and calculate time actually spent in the classroom.

The reason for adding a fifteenth week to the semester lies in the argument that in-class "study time" should be separate from in-class "evaluation time." This argument is set forth in a 2008 report by SGU to the Central Education Council in a section regarding improved substantiation of university credits. The report refers to a 2001 government survey that found that nearly half of Japanese university students do "little or no study" outside of class<sup>(4)</sup>. In simple words, the objective of adding a 15<sup>th</sup> week seems to be that, in addition to attuning non-exam classroom hours to a more readily calculable figure, more in-class study hours are a quantifiably measurable step toward improving the quality of education. Further, the addition of a 15<sup>th</sup> week is a step toward standardizing credit values with other universities across Japan and in Western countries, which also employ a 15-week class schedule plus an exam week. By aligning credit values with other universities, credits become more easily transferable between institutions. More information on how the Ministry envisions improvements to Japanese higher education can be found in the Ministry's recently published pamphlet (2009), available on the Ministry's website<sup>(5)</sup>.

The question of whether teachers are required to utilize the sixteenth "exam week" remains unanswered. Currently, teachers of all classes at SGU have two main options of either 1) holding a formal final exam during the exam week, or 2) requiring a final paper to be turned in after the 15-week semester finishes, thereby not using the exam week. Other exam formats, regardless of whether or not they make use of the sixteenth exam week, seem to be permissible. However, an issue arises when face-to-face teacher-student evaluations, such as speeches or speaking tests, are involved in a final assessment. The 60-minute "exam class" format is designed to accommodate lecture classes, which is understandable given that the majority of classes at a university are lectures<sup>(6)</sup>. For teachers of General English classes who focus on teaching and testing listening, writing, and reading/translation, the 60-minute exam class format may be appropriate. However, for classes that focus on an oral component and involve oral testing, the 60-minute exam class format may be insufficient. This is an issue that deserves to be addressed and researched in further detail. For now it must suffice that, where oral testing is concerned, the judicious use of in-class "study hours" for the purpose of conducting oral tests may be a necessary deviation from the principle of using classroom time only for the purpose of

instruction and not for evaluation.

Finally, as to why General English classes at SGU are worth only one credit, the answer lies in an outdated Ministry directive. Foreign language classes were once mandatorily classified as “practical training” (実習, *jisshuu*), as it was thought that maximizing in-class interaction with the teacher and/or with other students was essential. Whereas the Ministry now allows universities to choose whether to designate their foreign language classes as a “lecture” (as outlined above, 2 credits per semester) or as “practical training” (1 credit per semester), many universities have, for whatever reasons (possibly including convenience), retained the older 1-credit designation.

## Conclusion

The Standards offer only a rudimentary framework as to how the Ministry expects universities to operate. The trend, it would seem, is that universities are stepping up their efforts to self-analyze and self-improve through stricter, more conservative interpretations of the Standards. SGU’s insertion of a 15<sup>th</sup> week of classes is an example of this, although it is particularly a move toward aligning credit values with other universities. In any event, where the use of classroom time is concerned, it would seem that “more classroom time is better,” and therefore some utilization of the sixteenth week, even if not for formal examinations, seems appropriate for teachers to consider when designing their syllabi.

## Acknowledgement

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## 札幌学院大学における通常授業の他に定期試験の一週間使用の考え方

### 概 要

札幌学院大学における「一般英語」の授業科目については、定期試験を行う義務があるか、また、なぜ2単位でなく1単位しか取れないか、という二つの質問が先生方に長く問われてきた。この手短なりポートは、「大学設置基準」を背景にしてこの二つの問題を説明するものである。

キーワード：単位，定期試験，シラバス，一般英語，必修科目，授業，大学設置基準

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